A

LETTER

TO A

DEIST,

In Answer to several

OBJECTIONS

AGAINST THE

TRUTH and AUTHORITY

OF THE

Scriptures.

By the Right Reverend Father in God,
Edward Lord Bishop of *Worcester*.

LONDON: Printed by *H. C.* for *Rich. Cumberland*, at the *Angel* in St. *Paul's* Church-Yard, 1697.

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Ed. Stillingfleet

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Cary Coke Wife of Edward
Coke of Norfolk Esqr. 1705.

BRITISH MUSEUM
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PREFACE.

THis following Diſcourſe was Written for the ſatisfaction of a particular Perſon, who owned the Being and Providence of God, but expreſſed a mean Eſteem of the Scriptures, and the Chriſtian Religion. Which is become ſo common a Theme among the Scepticks of this Age, that the Author of this Diſcourſe thought it worth his time and care, to conſider the force of the Objections that were made againſt them. Eſpecially, being written in a grave and ſerious manner, and not with that Raillery and Buffonry, which the rude Perſons of this Age commonly beſtow upon

on Religion. It might be juſtly expected from ſuch who pretend to Breeding *and* Civility, *that they would at leaſt ſhew more reſpect to a thing, which hath prevailed ſo much among Men of the beſt Underſtanding and Education, and who have had no Intereſt to carry on by it. For it is againſt the ordinary Rules of Converſation, to affront that which others think they have great Reaſon to eſteem and love; and they would not endure that ſcorn and contempt of their meaneſt Servant, which they too often ſhew towards Religion, and the things belonging to it. If they are not* in earneſt *when they ſcoff and mock at ſacred things, their own conſciences will tell them it is a horrible impiety; if they are* in earneſt, *let them debate theſe things calmly and ſeriouſly, and let the ſtronger* Reaſon *prevail. Men may ſpeak ſharply and wittily againſt the cleareſt things in the World, as the* Scepticks *of old did againſt all*

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Certainty of Senſe and Reaſon; but we ſhould think that Man out of his Senſes, that would now diſpute the Being of the Sun, or the Colour of the Snow. We do not ſay, the Matters of Religion are capable of the ſame evidence with that of Senſe; but it is a great part of judgment and underſtanding, to know the proportion and fitneſs of evidence to the Nature of the thing to be proved. They would not have the Eye to judge of Taſtes, nor the Noſe of Metaphyſicks; *and yet theſe would be as proper as to have the Senſes judge of Immaterial Beings. If we do not give as good Reaſon for the Principles of our Religion, as the nature of Religion conſidered, can be given for it, let us then be blamed for our weakneſs in defending it; but let not Religion ſuffer, till they are ſure nothing more can be ſaid for it.*

There is a late Author, *I hear is mightily in vogue among many, who cry up any thing on the* Atheiſtical *Tractat. Theol. politic.*

ſide, *though never ſo weak and trifling. It were no difficult Task to lay open the falſe Reaſonings, and inconſiſtent* Hypotheſes *of his Book; which hath been ſufficiently done already in that Language wherein it was written. But if for the* Advancement *of* Irreligion *among us, that* Book *be, as it is talked, Tranſlated into our Tongue, there will not, I hope, want thoſe who will be as ready to defend* Religion *and* Morality, *as others are to decry and deſpiſe them.*

A Letter of Reſolution to a Perſon unſatisfied about the Truth and Authority of the Scriptures.

SIR,

ALthough I do not pretend to any skill in the *depths of Theology*, yet I am heartily concerned for the *Truth* and *Honour* of the *Chriſtian Religion*; which it is the deſign of your Papers to undermine. When I firſt looked them over, I could not think them ſo conſiderable as to deſerve a particular Anſwer; eſpecially, from one in my Circumſtances, who have ſo much other Buſineſs lying upon me, and ſo little Leiſure and Health to perform it; but I found at the concluſion

of your Papers, ſo earneſt and vehement a deſire expreſſed by you, that I would return an Anſwer, in order to the ſettlement of your Mind, that I could not refuſe an Office of ſo great Charity, as you repreſent it to be. I confeſs, when I conſidered the nature of your Objections, and the manner of managing them, I could hardly believe that they proceeded from a doubtful Mind, that was deſirous of any ſatisfaction; but ſince you tell me ſo, I will firſt ſhew my Charity in believing it, and then in endeavouring to give you my poor Aſſiſtance, and impartial Advice, in order to your ſatisfaction. And in truth, I think impartial Advice will contribute more to that end, than ſpending Time and Paper in running through all the difficulties, which it is poſſible for a cavilling Mind to raiſe againſt the plaineſt *Truths* in the World. For there

is nothing ſo clear and evident, but a *Sophiſtical Wit* will always find ſomething to ſay againſt it; and if you be the *Perſon* I take you for, you very well know, that there have been ſome, who wanted neither Wit, nor Eloquence, who have gone about to prove, *That there was Nothing in the World; and that if there were any Thing, it could not be underſtood by Men; that if it were underſtood by one Man, it could not be expreſſed to another:* And beſides ſuch extravagant Undertakers as theſe, how many have there been, who with plauſible and ſubtle Arguments, have endeavoured to overthrow all manner of *Certainty*, either by *Senſe* or *Reaſon?* Muſt we therefore quit all pretences to *Certainty*, becauſe we cannot, it may be, Anſwer all the Subtilties of the *Scepticks?* And therefore I am by no means ſatisfied with your manner of proceeding, *deſiring*

ſiring all particular Difficulties to be Anſwer'd, before we conſider the main Evidences of the Chriſtian Faith: For the only reaſonable way of proceeding in this matter, is to conſider, firſt, whether there be ſufficient *Motives* to perſwade you to imbrace the *Chriſtian Faith*; and then to weigh the difficulties, and to compare them with the *Reaſons* and *Arguments* for believing; and if thoſe do not appear great enough to overthrow the force of the other, you may reſt ſatisfied in the *Chriſtian Faith*, although you cannot Anſwer every Difficulty that may be raiſed againſt the *Books* wherein our Religion is contained. I pray Sir, conſider with your ſelf; do not you think it poſſible for any Man to have Faith enough to ſave him, unleſs he can ſolve all the difficulties in *Chronology* that are in the *Bible*; unleſs he can give an account of every particular *Law*

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and *Cuſtom* among the *Jews*; unleſs he can make out all the *Prophetick Schemes*, and can tell what the *Number* of the *Beaſt* in the *Apocalypſe* means? If a Man may believe and be ſaved, without theſe things, to what purpoſe are they objected for the overthrow of the *Chriſtian Faith?* Do you think a Man hath not Reaſon enough to believe there is *extended Matter* in the World, unleſs he can ſolve all the Difficulties that ariſe from the *extenſion* or *diviſibility* of *Matter*; or that he hath a *Soul*, unleſs he can make it clear how an immaterial and material Subſtance can be ſo united as our *Soul* and *Body* are? Or that the *Sun* ſhines, unleſs he can demonſtrate whether the *Sun* or the *Earth* moves? Or that we have any *certainty* of things, unleſs he can aſſign the undoubted *criterion* of *Truth* and *Falſhood* in all things? Theſe things I mention

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on purpoſe, to let you ſee, that the moſt certain things, have difficulties about them, which no one thinks it neceſſary for him to Anſwer, in order to his aſſurance of the *Truth* of the *things*; but as long as the evidence for them is much more conſiderable than the Objections againſt them, we may ſafely acquieſce in our aſſent to them, and leave the unfolding theſe difficulties to *the Diſputers of this World*, or the *Knowledge* of another. Is it not far more reaſonable for us to think, that in *Books* of ſo great *Antiquity*, as thoſe of *Moſes* are, written in a Language whoſe *Idiotiſms* are ſo different from ours, there may be ſome difficulty in the *Phraſes*, or computation of Times or Cuſtoms of the People, that we cannot well underſtand, than that all the Miracles wrought by *Moſes* ſhould have been Impoſtures; and that Law, which

which was preſerved ſo conſtantly, maintained with that reſolution by the wiſeſt of the People of the *Jews*, who choſe to die rather than diſown it, ſhould be all a Cheat? Is it not more reaſonable for us to ſuſpect our own Underſtandings, as to the *Speeches* and *Actions* of ſome of the *Prophets*, than to think that Men, who deſigned ſo much the advancing Virtue, and diſcouraging Vice, ſhould be a pack of Hypocrites and Deceivers? Can any Man of common ſenſe ſuſpect the *Chriſtian Religion* to be a *Fourb*, or an Impoſture, becauſe he cannot underſtand the Number of the *Beaſt*, or Interpret the *Apocalyptick Viſions?* I could hardly have believed any Man pretending to *Reaſon*, could object theſe things, unleſs I ſaw them, and were called upon to Anſwer them.

Therefore, Sir, my ſerious and impartial Advice to you, is, in the firſt place to conſider and debate the main Point, *i. e.* the proofs of the *Chriſtian Doctrin*, and not to hunt up and down the *Scriptures* for every thing that ſeems a difficulty to you, and then by heaping all theſe together, to make the *Scriptures* ſeem a confuſed heap of indigeſted Stuff, which being taken in pieces and conſidered, with that modeſty, diligence, and care, that doth become us, will appear to contain nothing unbecoming that *Sacred* and *Venerable* Name which the *Scriptures* do bear among us.

If thererefore, you deſign not cavilling but ſatisfaction, you will joyn iſſue with me upon the moſt material Point, *viz. Whether the Chriſtian Religion were from God, or from Men?* For if this be proved to have been from *God*, all the other things will eaſily fall off

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of themſelves, or be removed with a little Induſtry.

In the Debate of this, I ſhall conſider, firſt, what things are agreed upon between us, and then where the difference lies.

1. *You grant an abſolutely perfect and independent Being, whom we call God.*

2. *That the World was at firſt Created, and is ſtill governed by Him.*

3. *That He is ſo Holy, as to be the Author of no Sin, although he doth not hinder Men from ſinning.*

4. *That this God is to receive from us all Worſhip proper to Him, of Prayers, Praiſes,* &c.

5. *That it is the Will of this God, that we ſhould lead holy, peaceable, and innocent Lives.*

6. *That God will accept Mens ſincere Repentance and hearty Endeavours to do his Will, although they do not perfectly obey it.*

7. *That*

7. *That there is a State of Rewards and Punishments in another World, according to the course of Mens Lives here.*

8. *That there are many excellent Precepts in the Writings of the New Testament inducing to Humility and Self-denyal, and to the Honour of God, and civil duty and honesty of Life; and these in a more plentiful manner than is to be found in any other Profession of Religion publickly known.*

The Questions then remaining, are, (1.) *Whether the Matters of Fact are true, which are reported in the Writings of the New Testament?* (2.) Supposing them true, *Whether they do sufficiently prove the Doctrin to have been from God?*

1. *Whether the Matters of Fact were true or no?* And as to this Point, I wish you had set down the Reasons of your doubting, more clearly and distinctly than you have done: What I can pick up,

up, amounts to these things. 1. *That there can be no certainty of a matter done at such a distance of time, there having been many fictitious Histories in the World.* 2. *That it is probable, that these things might be written, when there was no one Living to detect the Falshood of them; and thus you say, the* Grecians, Romans, Egyptians, *and other Nations were at first imposed upon by some Men, who pretended to deliver to them the History of their Gods and Heroes, and the Wonders wrought by them.* 3. *That these things might more easily be done, before Printing was used; and that there is reason to suspect the more, because of the Pious Frauds of the Primitive Christians, and the Legends of the Papists.* 4. *That there may have been many more Deceptions and Impostures in the way of propogating false Revelations and Miracles, than we can now discover.* 5. *That we ought not to take the Te-*

Objections against the Authority

ſtimony of Scripture, or the Chriſtian Writers in this caſe, becauſe they may be ſuſpected of partiality; and that the Teſtimony of Joſephus *is ſuſpected by divers learned Men to be fraudulently put in by Chriſtians. 6. That there are ſufficient Grounds from the Story it ſelf, and the Objections of Enemies, to ſuſpect the truth of it; becauſe of the contradiction and inconſiſtency of the parts of it; the want of accompliſhment of the Promiſes and Prophecies of it; the obſcurity and unintelligibleneſs of other parts; the defects of the Perſons mentioned therein, St.* Paul's *oſtentation, the jarrs between* Peter *and* Paul, *and* Paul *and* Barnabas. *7. That from theſe things you have juſt cauſe to doubt the Apoſtles ſincerity, and you think they might have indirect ends in divulging the Miracles recorded in Scripture; and that Men might be contented to ſuffer, to make themſelves Heads of a new Sect of Religion, and to rule over the*

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Conſciences of Men; and that they had time enough to make a conſiderable intereſt before the Perſecutions began.

This is the force of all I can find out, in the ſeveral parts of your Papers, towards the invalidating the Teſtimony concerning the *Matters of Fact* reported in the Writings of the New Teſtament.

In Anſwer to all theſe Things, ſhall ſhew; 1. That Matters of Fact done at ſuch a diſtance of time may have ſufficient evidence to oblige Men to believe them. 2. That there is no reaſon to ſuſpect the Truth of thoſe Matters of Fact, which are contained in the Hiſtory of the New Teſtament. 3. That the *Apoſtles* gave the greateſt Teſtimonies of their Sincerity, that could be expected from them; and that no Matters of Fact were ever better atteſted than thoſe which are reported by them; from whence it will fol-

low, That it is not Reaſon but unreaſonable *Suſpicion* and *Scepticiſm*, if not wilfulneſs and obſtinacy, which makes Men to continue to doubt after ſo great Evidence.

1. That we may have ſuch evidence of *Matters of Fact* done at ſuch a *diſtance* of time, as may oblige us to believe the Truth of them. This we are firſt to make out, becauſe ſeveral of your Objections ſeem to imply, *That we can have no certainty of ſuch Things; becauſe we cannot know what Tricks may have been plaid in former times, when it was far more eaſie to deceive; and that it is confeſſed, there have been ſeveral Frauds of this kind, which have a long time prevailed in the World.* But have not the very ſame Arguments been uſed againſt all *Religion*, by *Atheiſts?* And if the *Cheats* that have been in *Religion*, have no force againſt the

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Being of *God*, why ſhould they have any againſt the *Chriſtian Religion?* And if the common conſent of Mankind ſignifie any thing as to the acknowledgement of a *Deity*, why ſhould not the *Teſtimony* of the *Chriſtian Church*, ſo circumſtantiated as it is, be of ſufficient ſtrength to receive the Matters of Fact delivered by it? which is all I at preſent deſire. Do we queſtion any of the Stories delivered by the common conſent of *Greek* or *Latin Hiſtorians*, although we have only the bare Teſtimony of thoſe Hiſtorians for them? And yet your *Objections* would lye againſt every one of them: How do we know the great prevalency of the *Roman Empire?* Was it not delivered by thoſe who belonged to it, and were concerned to make the beſt of it? What know we, but *thouſands* of *Hiſtories* have been loſt, that confuted all that

we now have concerning the greatneſs of *Rome?* What know we, but that *Rome* was deſtroyed by *Carthage*, or that *Hannibal* quite overthrew the *Roman Empire*; or that *Catiline* was one of the beſt Men of the World, becauſe all our preſent Hiſtories were written by Men of the other ſide? How can we tell but that the *Perſians* deſtroyed the *Macedonians*, becauſe all our *Accounts* of *Alexander*'s Expedition, are Originally from the *Greeks?* And why might not we ſuſpect greater partiality in all theſe Caſes, when the Writers did not give a thouſand part of that Evidence for their Fidelity, that the Firſt *Chriſtians* did? And yet, what ſhould we think of ſuch a Perſon who ſhould call in queſtion the beſt Hiſtories of all Nations, becauſe they are written by thoſe of the ſame *Country?* By which it ſeems, you will never allow any

any competent Teſtimony at all; for if ſuch things be written by Enemies and Strangers, we have reaſon to ſuſpect both their knowledge and integrity; if written by *Friends*, then though they might know the *Truth*, yet they would write partially of their own ſide: So that upon this Principle, no Hiſtory at all, ancient or modern, is to be believed; for they are all reported either by Friends or Enemies: And ſo not only Divine, but all Humane Faith will be deſtroyed. I am by no means a Friend to unreaſonable Credulity; but I am as little to unreaſonable diſtruſt and ſuſpicion; if the one be Folly, the other is Madneſs. No prudent Man believes any thing, becauſe it is poſſible to be true; nor rejects any thing meerly becauſe it is poſſible to be falſe: But it is the prudence of every Man to weigh and conſider all Circum-

ſtances, and according to them, to aſſent, or diſſent. We all know it is poſſible for Men to deceive, or to be deceived, but we know there is no neceſſity of either; and that there is ſuch a thing as Truth in the World; and though Men may deceive, yet they do not always ſo; and that Men may know they are not deceived. For elſe there could be no ſuch thing as *Society* among Mankind; no *Friendſhip*, or *Truſt*, or *Confidence* in the Word of another Perſon; becauſe it is poſſible that the beſt Friend I have may deceive me, and the World is full of diſſimulation, muſt I therefore believe no Body? This is the juſt conſequence of this way of Arguing, *That we have reaſon to ſuſpect the Truth of theſe Matters of Fact, becauſe there have been many Frauds in the World, and might have been many more than we can now diſcover*; for if this Prin-

Principle be purſued, it will deſtroy all Society among Men; which is built on the Suppoſition of mutual truſt and confidence that Men have in each other: And although it be poſſible for all Men to deceive, becauſe we cannot know one anothers Hearts, yet there are ſuch Characters of Honeſty and Fidelity in ſome Perſons, that others dare venture their Lives and Fortunes upon their Words. And is any Man thought a Fool for doing ſo? Nay, have not the moſt prudent and ſagacious Men repoſed a mighty confidence in the Integrity of others? And without this, no great Affairs can be carried on in the World; for ſince the greateſt Perſons need the help of others to manage their Buſineſs, they muſt truſt other Men continually; and every Man puts his Life into the Hands of others,

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to whom he gives any freedom of Acceſs, and eſpecially his Servants: Muſt a Man therefore live in continual Suſpicion and Jealouſie, becauſe it is poſſible he may be deceived? But if this be thought unreaſonable, then we gain thus much, that notwithſtanding the poſſibility of Deception, Men may be truſted in ſome caſes, and their Fidelity ſafely relied upon: This being granted, we are to enquire what that aſſurance is which makes us Truſt any one; and where-ever we find a Concurrance of the ſame Circumſtances, or equal evidence of Fidelity, we may repoſe the ſame truſt or confidence in them. And we may ſoon find that it is not any ones bare Word that makes us truſt him; but either the reputation of his Integrity among diſcerning Men; or our long experience and obſervation of him: This latter is only

only confined to our own tryal; but the former is more general, and reaches beyond our own Age, ſince we may have the *Teſtimony* of diſcerning Perſons convey'd down to us in as certain a manner, as we can know the Mind of a *Friend* at a 100 Miles diſtance, *viz.* by Writing. And in this caſe, we deſire no more than to be ſatisfied that thoſe things were written by them; and that they deſerved to be believed in what they writ; thus, if any one would be ſatisfied about the Paſſages of the *Peloponneſian War*, and hath heard that *Thucydides* hath accurately written it, he hath no more to do, than to enquire whether this *Thucydides* were capable of giving a good Account of it, and for that, he hears that he was a great and inquiſitive Perſon, that lived in that Age, and knew all the Occurrences of it; and when he is ſatisfied of that, his next

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Enquiry is, whether he may be truſted or no; and for this, he can expect no better ſatisfaction, than that his Hiſtory hath been in great reputation for its integrity among the moſt knowing Perſons; but how ſhall he be ſure this was the Hiſtory, written by *Thucydides*, ſince there have been many counterfeit Writings obtruded upon the World? Beſides, the conſent of learned Men in all Ages ſince, we may compare the *Teſtimonies* cited out of it with the Hiſtory we have, and the Style, with the Character given of *Thucydides*, and the Narrations, with other credible Hiſtories of thoſe *Times*; and if all theſe agree, what reaſon can there be not to rely upon the Hiſtory of *Thucydides?* All Learned Men do acknowledge, that there have been multitudes of fictitious Writings; but do they therefore queſtion, whether there are any genuine?

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Or whether we have not the true *Herodotus*, *Strabo*, or *Pausanias*, because there is a counterfeit *Berosus*, *Manetho*, and *Philo*, set forth by *Annius* of *Viterbo*? Do any suspect whether we have any of the genuin Works of *Cicero*, because an *Italian* counterfeited a Book *De Consolatione* in his name? Or whether *Cæsar*'s *Commentaries* were his own, because it is uncertain who Writ the *Alexandrian War* that is joined with them? By which we see, that we may not only be certain of the Fidelity of Persons we converse with, but of all things necessary to our belief of what was done at a great distance of time from the *Testimony* of Writers, notwithstanding the many supposititious Writings that have been in the World.

But it may be said, *That all this only relates to meer Matters of History, wherein a Man is not much con-*

concerned whether they be true or false; but the things we are about are Matters that Mens Salvation or Damnation are said to depend upon, and therefore greater Evidence should be given of these, to oblige Men to believe them.

To this I answer. 1. That my Design herein, was to prove, that notwithstanding the possibility of deception, there may be sufficient Ground for a prudent and firm assent to the Truth of things done at as great a distance of time and convey'd after the same manner, that the Matters of Fact reported in the *New Testament are*; and hereby those general Prejudices are shewed to be unreasonable: And all that I desire from this Discourse, is, that you would give an assent of the same nature to the History of the *Gospel*, that you do to *Cæsar*, or *Livy*, or *Tacitus*, or any other ancient Historian. 2. As to the greater

greater obligation to aſſent, I ſay it depends upon the Evidence of Divine Revelation, which is given by the Matters of Fact which are delivered to us. And here give me leave to ask you; 1. Whether it be any ways repugnant to any conception you have of God, for him to make uſe of fallible Men to make known his Will to the World? 2. Whether thoſe Men, though ſuppoſed to be in themſelves fallible, can either deceive, or be deceived, when God makes known his Mind to them? 3. Whether on ſuppoſition, that God hath made uſe of ſuch Perſons for this end, thoſe are not obliged to believe them, who do not live in the ſame *Age* with them? If not, then *God* muſt either make no *Revelation* at all, or he muſt make a new one every Age: If they are, then the obligation lies as much on us

now to believe, as if we had lived and converſed with thoſe inſpired Perſons.

2. That there is no reaſon to ſuſpect the Truth of thoſe Matters of Fact which are reported in the *New Teſtament*; For ſince it is univerſally agreed among Men, that Humane *Teſtimony* is a ſufficient ground for aſſent, where there is no poſitive ground for Suſpicion; becauſe deceiving and being deceived, is not the common Intereſt of Mankind; therefore we are to conſider what the general grounds of *Suſpicion* are, and whether any of them do reach the *Apoſtles Teſtimony*, concerning the Matters of Fact reported by them. And the juſt grounds of Suſpicion are theſe; 1. If the *Perſons* be otherwiſe known to be Men of Artifice and Cunning, full of Tricks and Diſſimulation, and that make no Conſcience of ſpeaking Truth,

ſo

ſo a Lye tends to their greateſt advantage; which is too much the *Papiſts* caſe in their *Legends*, and *Stories* of *Miracles*. 2. If they temper and ſuit their Story and Doctrin to the *Humour* and *Genius* of the People, they hope to prevail upon, as *Mahomet* did, in encouraging *War* and *Laſciviouſneſs*. 3. If they lay the Scene of their Story at a mighty diſtance from themſelves, at ſuch an Age, wherein it is impoſſible either to prove, or diſprove; which is the caſe of the *Brachmans*, as to their *Brahma*, and their *Vedu*; and was of the *Heathens* as to their Fabulous Deities. 4. If there be any thing contained in the Story, which is repugnant to the moſt authentick Hiſtories of thoſe times; by which means the Impoſtures of *Annius* have been diſcovered. 5. If there be evident contradiction in the Story it ſelf; or any thing repugnant

to, or unbecoming the Majesty, Holiness, Sincerity, and Consistency of a Divine Revelation; on which account we reject *Fanatick* Pretences to *Revelations*. If there were any thing of this nature in the *Writings* of the *New Testament*, we might then allow there were some Ground to suspect the *Truth* of what is contained therein: But I shall undertake, by the Grace of God, to defend that there is not any foundation for suspicion as to any one of these.

1. As to the *Persons*, such who go about to deceive others, must be Men that are versed in Business, and know how to deal with Men; and that have some Interest already that they have gained by other means, before they can carry on such a Design as to abuse Mankind, by Lyes and Impostures in *Religion*: Therefore the *Atheists* lay the deceiving the World

World by *Religion*, to the Charge of *Politicians* and *Law-givers*, to Man verſed in the practice of Fraud, ſuch as *Numa*, or *Lycurgus*, or *Xaca*, or *Mahomet*, ſuch as underſtood the ways of cajoling the People; or to *ſubtle Prieſts*, that know how to ſuit the hopes and fears of the ſuperſtitious multitude; whence came the multitude of Frauds in the *Heathen Temples* and *Oracles*. But would any Man in the World have pitched upon a few *Fiſhermen*, and illiterate Perſons, to carry on ſuch an Intrigue as this? Men that were rude and unexperienced in the World, and uncapable of dealing in the way of Artifice with one of the common Citizens of *Hieruſalem*. When was it ever heard that ſuch Men made ſuch an alteration in the *Religion* of the World, as the Primitive *Chriſtians* did, againſt the moſt violent Perſecutions? And when

they prevailed ſo much, the common Charge ſtill againſt them was, that they were a Company of *Rude*, *Mean*, *Obſcure*, *Illiterate*, *Simple Men*: And yet in ſpight of all the Cunning, and Malice, and Learning, and Strength of their Adverſaries, they gained Ground upon them, and prevailed over the *Obſtinacy* of the *Jews*, and *Wiſdom* of the *Greeks*. If the *Chriſtian Religion* had been a meer deſign of the *Apoſtles* to make themſelves *Heads* of a new *Sect*, what had this been but to have ſet the Cunning of twelve, or thirteen Men, of no Intereſt, or Reputation, againſt the *Wiſdom* and *Power* of the whole World? If they had any *Wiſdom*, they would never have undertaken ſuch an impoſſible Deſign as this muſt appear to them at firſt view: And if they had none, how could they ever hope to manage it? If their aim were only

only at Reputation, they might have thought of thouſands of ways more probable, and more advantageous than this: If we ſuppoſe Men ſhould be willing to hazard their Lives for their Reputations, we may ſuppoſe, withal, ſuch Men to have ſo much Cunning as not to do it till they cannot help it; but if they can have Reputation and Eaſe together, they had rather have it. I will therefore put the Caſe concerning the only Perſon that had the advantage of a Learned Education among the *Apoſtles*; *viz.* St. *Paul*, and whom you ſeem to ſtrike at more than the reſt: Is it reaſonable to believe, that when he was in favour with the *Sanhedrin*, and was likely to advance himſelf by his oppoſition to *Chriſtanity*, and had a fair proſpect of Eaſe and Honour together; he ſhould quit all this, to joyn with ſuch an inconſide-

rable and hated Company, as the *Christians* were, only to be one of the *Heads* of a very small Number of Men, and to purchase it at so dear a rate as the loss of his Friends and Interest, and running on continual Troubles and Persecutions, to the hazard of his Life? It is possible for Men that are deceived and mean honestly to do this; but it is scarce supposable of a Man in his Senses that should know and believe all this to be a *Cheat*, and yet own and embrace it, to so great disadvantage to himself: When he could not make himself so considerable by it, as he might have been without it. Men must love *cheating* the World at a strange rate, that will let go fair hopes of preferment and ease, and lead a life of perpetual trouble, and expose themselves to the utmost hazards, only for the sake of deluding others. If the

Apostles

Apoſtles knew all they ſaid to be falſe, and made it ſo neceſſary for all Men to believe what they ſaid to be true; they were ſome of the greateſt Deceivers which the World had ever known: But Men that take pleaſure in deceiving, make uſe of many Artifices on purpoſe to catch the ſilly Multitude; they have all the arts of Inſinuation and Fawning Speeches, fit to draw in the weakeſt, and ſuch as love to be flatter'd; but what is there tending this way in all the Apoſtles Writings? How ſharply do they ſpeak to the *Jewiſh Sanhedrin*, upon the Murther of Chriſt? With what plainneſs and ſimplicity do they go about to perſwade Men to be *Chriſtians*? They barely tell the Matters of Fact concerning the *Reſurrection* of *Chriſt*, and ſay *they were Eye-Witneſſes of it*, and upon the credit of this *Teſtimony* of theirs, they Preach *Faith*

and *Repentance* to *Jews*, and *Gentiles*: Was ever any thing farther from the appearance of Artifice than this was? So that if they were Deceivers, they were ſome of the Subtileſt that ever were in the World, becauſe there ſeems to be ſo little Ground for any ſuſpicion of Fraud; and we cannot eaſily imagin Perſons of their Education, capable of ſo profound Diſſimulation and ſo Artificial a Cheat. Beſides all this, we are to conſider how far ſuch Perſons do allow the liberty of *Diſſimulation* and *Artificial Juglings*, eſpecially in *Religion*; we ſee the *Papiſts* could not practice theſe things, without being forced to defend them, by ſhewing how convenient it is for the People to be told ſtrange Stories of *Saints*, on purpoſe *to nouriſh Devotion* in them: To which end, they ſay, *It ſignifies not much, whether they were true or no:* And withall

all they aſſert, the *Lawfulneſs of Equivocations, and Mental Reſervations, and doing Things, not otherwiſe juſtifiable, for the Honour of their Church and Religion*; And I ſhall freely confeſs to you, If I found any countenance to ſuch things as theſe, from the Doctrin or Practice of the *Apoſtles*, it would give me too juſt a ground for ſuſpicion as to what they delivered. For if they allow'd *Equivocations*, or *Mental Reſervations*, how could I poſſibly know what they meant by any thing they ſaid? For that which was neceſſary to make the Propoſition true, lay without my reach in the Mind of another; and while they ſo firmly atteſted that *Chriſt was riſen from the Dead*; they might underſtand it of a *Spiritual* or *Myſtical Reſurrection*; but if they ſhould be found to allow *Lying* or *Cheating for the cauſe of Religion*, their Credit would be gone with me;

me; for how could I be any longer ſure of the *Truth* of one Word they ſaid? I ſhould be ſo far from thinking them *Infallible*, that I could not but ſuſpect them to have a deſign to deceive me. The firſt thing therefore we are to look at in Perſons who require our Belief, is the ſtricteſt Veracity; if they falter in this, they expoſe themſelves to the ſuſpicion of all but credulous Fools. But we no where find greater Plainneſs and Sincerity required, no where more ſtrict and ſevere Prohibitions of Diſſimulation in *Religion*, nor more general Precepts about *ſpeaking Truth*, than in the Writings of the *New Teſtament*. *But might not all this be done with the greater Artifice to prevent Suſpicion?* Suſpicion is a thing, which *he that ſet Bounds to the Sea*, can ſet no Bounds to; if Men will give way to it, without Reaſon, there can be no end of it.

For

For the moſt effectual ways to prevent it, will ſtill afford new Matter and Occaſion for it. If Men do uſe the utmoſt means that are poſſible, to aſſure others of their ſincerity, and they will not believe them, but ſtill ſuſpect the Deſign to be ſo much deeper laid; there is no way left poſſible to ſatisfy ſuch Men; their Suſpicion is a Diſeaſe incurable by rational means, and ſuch Perſons deſerve to be given over as paſt all remedy. If Men act like prudent Men, they will judge according to the *Reaſon* of *Things*; but if they entertain a Jealouſie of all Mankind, and the moſt of thoſe who give them the greateſt aſſurance they have no Intention to deceive them, it is to no purpoſe to go about to ſatisfie ſuch Perſons, for that very undertaking makes them more ſuſpicious. If the *Apoſtles* therefore gave as much Ground

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as ever any *Perſons* did, or could do, that they had no deſign to impoſe upon the World, but proceeding with all the fairneſs and openneſs, with the greateſt evidence of their ſincerity, there can be no reaſon to faſten upon them the imputation of cunning Men, who made it their Buſineſs to deceive others.

2. This will more appear if we conſider the *Matters* deliver'd by them, and the Nature of their Doctrin. For if the *Chriſtian Religion* were only a contrivance of the firſt Preachers of it, it muſt by the event be ſuppoſed that they were very ſubtle Men, who in ſo little time, and againſt ſo great oppoſition could prevail over both *Jews* and *Gentiles*; but if we reflect on the *Nature* of their *Doctrin*, we can never imagin that theſe Men did proceed by the ſame Methods that Men of ſubtilty do make uſe of. If it were

were there own contrivance, it was in their power to have framed it as they thought fit themſelves; and in all probability, they would have done it in a way moſt likely to be ſucceſsful; but the *Chriſtian Religion* was ſo far from it, as though they had induſtriouſly deſigned to advance a *Religion* againſt the *Genius* and *Inclination* of all Mankind. For it neither gratifies the voluptuous in their Pleaſures, nor the Ambitious in their deſires of External Pomp and Greatneſs, nor the Covetous in their thirſt after Riches; but lays a ſevere reſtraint on all thoſe common and prevailing Paſſions of Mankind; which *Mahomet* well underſtood, when he ſuited his *Religion* to them. *Chriſtianity* was neither accommodated to the Temper and Genius either of *Jews* or *Gentiles*: The *Jews* were in great expectation of a Temporal *Prince*

at

at that time to deliver them from the *Roman* Slavery; and every one that would have ſet up for ſuch a *Meſſias*, might have had Followers enough among them, as we find afterwards by the attempts of *Barchocebas* and others. But the *Meſſias* of the *Chriſtians* was ſo directly contrary to their hopes and expectations, being a *poor* and *ſuffering Prince*, that this ſet them the more againſt his Followers, becauſe they were hereby fruſtrated of their greateſt hopes, and defeated in their moſt pleaſing expectations: But beſides, if they would have taken in the *Moſaick Law*, it might in probability have ſucceeded better; but this St. *Paul* would by no means hear of. *But if they rejected the Jews, methinks they ſhould have been willing to have had ſome aſſiſtance from the Gentiles.* No, they Charged them with *Idolatry* where-ever they came,

and

and would not join in any parts of their Worſhip with them, nor ſo much as Eat of the *remainder* of their *Sacrifices*. But ſuppoſing they had a mind to ſet up wholly a new *Sect* of their own; yet we ſhould think they ſhould have framed it after the moſt plauſible manner, and left out all things that were moſt liable to Reproach and Infamy: But this they were ſo far from, that the moſt contemptible part of the *Chriſtian Religion*, viz. *A Crucified Saviour*, they inſiſt the moſt upon, and Preach it on all Occaſions, and in compariſon of it, ſtrangely deſpiſe all the *Wiſdom* and *Philoſophy* of the *Greeks*. What did theſe Men mean, if *Chriſtianity* had been only a *contrivance* of theirs? If they had but left out this one Circumſtance, in all Humane probability, the excellent moral Precepts in *Chriſtianity* would have been highly magnified

nified among all those who had been bred up under the Instructions of *Philosophers*. Nay, they would not make use of the most commendable Methods of Humane Wisdom; nor do as the *Jesuits* have done in *China*, make Men have a better opinion of the *Religion* they brought, for their skill in *Mathematicks* and *Astronomy*; but as much as it was possible, to let the World see it was no contrivance of Humane Wisdom, they shunned all the ways of shewing it in the manner of its propagation. Nay, when the People would have given the *Apostles* Divine Worship, never were vain Men more concerned to have it, than they to oppose it; And do these things look like the Actions of Men that designed only to make themselves great, by being the *Heads* of a new *Sect* of *Religion?*

3. Men

3. Men that made it their deſign to deceive the World, if they had thought it neceſſary to bring in any matter of *Story* concerning the *Author* of their *Religion*, would have placed it at ſuch *a diſtance of Time*, that it was not capable of being diſproved: As it is apparent in the *Heathen Mythology*; for the Stories were ſuch, as no Perſon could ever pretend to confute them, otherwiſe than by the inconſiſtency of them with the common Principles of *Religion*. But if we ſuppoſe *Chriſtianity* to have been a meer device, would the *Apoſtles* have been ſo ſenſeleſs to have laid the main Proof of their *Religion* on a thing which was but newly acted, and which they were very capable of enquiring into all the Circumſtances that related to it, *viz.* the *Reſurrection of Chriſt from the Dead*? We may ſee by the whole

deſign of the *New Teſtament*, the great ſtreſs of *Chriſtianity* was laid upon the Truth of this; to this, *Chriſt* himſelf appealed before hand: To this all the *Apoſtles* refer as the mighty confirmation of their Religion; and this they deliver as a thing which themſelves had ſeen, and had converſed with him for 40 Days together, with all the demonſtrations imaginable of a *true* and *real Body:* And that not to one or two credulous Perſons, but ſo many of them who were hard to be ſatisfied, and one, not without the moſt ſenſible Evidence; but beſides theſe, they tell us of 500 *at once who ſaw him. whereof many were then living*, when thoſe things were Written. Now I pray tell me what *Religion* in the World ever put it ſelf upon ſo fair a Tryal as this? Of a plain Matter of Fact, as capable of being atteſted as any could be. Why

Why did not *Amida*, or *Brahma*, or *Xaca*, or any other of the Authors of the preſent *Religions* of the *Eaſt-Indies*? Why did not *Orpheus*, or *Numa*, or any other Introducers of *Religious* Cuſtoms among the *Greeks* or *Romans*? Or *Mahomet* among the *Arabians*, put the iſſue of the Truth of their *Religion*, on ſuch a plain and eaſie *Trial* as this? If you ſay, *That Chriſt appeared only to his Friends, who were ready to believe ſuch things, and not among his Enemies:* I Anſwer, That though they were his *Friends*, yet they were very hard to be perſwaded of the *Truth* of it at firſt; and afterwards gave larger Teſtimonies of their Fidelity than the Teſtimony of the greateſt *Enemies* would have been; for we ſhould have had only their *bare Words* for it, (if they would have given that, which is very queſtionable, conſidering their dealing with the other *Mi-*

racles of *Christ*:) But the *Apostles* manifested their *Sincerity* by all real Proofs that could be thought sufficient to satisfie Mankind; appealing to the very Persons who were concerned the most in it, having a hand in the Death of *Christ*, declaring their greatest readiness to suffer any thing rather than deny the Truth of it, and laying down their Lives at last for it. If all this had been a meer Fiction, how unlikely is it, that among so many as were conscious of it, no one Person by Hopes or Fears, by Flatteries or Threatnings, could ever be prevailed upon to deny the Truth of it? If there had been any such thing, what Triumphing had there been among the *Jews*; and no doubt his Name had been Recorded to Posterity among the Writers, both of *Jews* and *Gentiles*, that were professed Enemies of *Christianity*? But they

they are all wonderfully ſilent in this matter; and inſtead of ſaying enough to overthrow the *Truth of Chriſtianity*, as you ſeem to ſuggeſt, I do aſſure you, I am mightily confirmed in the Belief of the Truth of it, by carefully obſerving the ſlightneſs of the Objections that were made againſt it, by its moſt profeſſed Enemies.

But you ſeem to imply, *That all this Story concerning Chriſt was invented long after the pretended time of his being in the World.* Why may not you as well ſuſpect, that *Julius Cæſar* lived before *Romulus*, or that *Auguſtus* lived at the Siege of *Troy?* For you might as well reject all Hiſtory upon ſuch Grounds as thoſe you aſſign; and think *Mahomet* as right in his *Chronology*, as the *Bible*. It is time for us to burn all our *Books*, if we have lived in ſuch a Cheat all this while. Methinks you

might as well ask, whether *Lucretia* were not *Pope Joan?* Or *Alexander* the *Sixth*, one of the *Roman Emperors?* Or whether *Luther* were not the *Emperor* of *Turky?* For there is no greater evidence of any Hiſtory in the World, than there is, that all the things reported in the *New Teſtament* were done at that time, when they are pretended to be.

4. Therefore we offer this Story of the *New Teſtament* to be compared with all the *Circumſtances of that Age*, delivered by any other *Hiſtorians*, to try if any *Inconſiſtencies* can be found therein: Which is the moſt reaſonable way can be taken to diſprove any Hiſtory. If it could be proved, that there could be no ſuch *Taxation* of the *Empire* as is mention'd in the time of *Auguſtus*, that *Herod* did not live in that *Age*, or that the *Jews* were not

not under the *Roman Government*, or that there were no *High Prieſts* at that time, nor the *Sects* of *Phariſees* and *Saducees*, or that there were any other remarkable *Characters* of time ſet down in the *Hiſtory* of the *New Teſtament*, which could be manifeſtly diſproved; there were ſome pretence to call in Queſtion the Truth of the Story; but there is not the leaſt Foundation for any ſcruple on this account; All things agreeing ſo well with the trueſt accounts we have of that *Age*, both from *Joſephus* and the *Roman Hiſtory*. I ſhall not inſiſt on the particular *Teſtimony* of *Joſephus* concerning *Chriſt*, becauſe we need it not; and if thoſe who queſtion it, would proceed with the ſame ſeverity againſt many other particular Paſſages in good *Authors*, they might as well call them in queſtion as they do that; ſince it is confeſſed, that all the

Ancient *Manuſcripts* have it in them, and ſuppoſing that it doth not come in well, muſt we ſuppoſe it impoſſible for *Joſephus* to Write incoherently? Yet this is the main Argument that ever I have ſeen urged againſt this *Teſtimony* of *Joſephus*. But I ſay, we need it not; all other things concurring in ſo high a degree to prove the *Truth* of the *Hiſtory* of *Chriſt*. Yet ſince you ſeem to expreſs ſo much doubtfulneſs concerning it, *as though it were framed when there was no one living capable of diſproving it*; give me leave to ſhew you the great abſurdity of ſuch a Suppoſition. 1. Becauſe we have the plain Teſtimonies of the greateſt Enemies of *Chriſtianity*, that there was ſuch a Perſon as *Chriſt* was, who ſuffered according to the *Scripture-Story*. For *Tacitus* not only mentions the *Chriſtians* as ſuffering at *Rome* for their *Religion* in the *time* of *Nero*,

(*Annal.*

(*Annal.* 15.) but ſaith, *That the Author of this Religion was one Chriſt, who ſuffered under* Pontius Pilate, *Procurator of* Judea, *in the time of* Tiberius; which is an irrefragable Teſtimony of the *Truth* of the Story concerning *Chriſt*, in an *Age*, when if it had been falſe, nothing could have been more eaſily detected than ſuch a Fiction, by the number of *Jews* which were continually at *Rome*: And neither *Julian*, nor *Celſus*, nor *Porphyrie*, nor *Lucian*, did ever queſtion the *Truth* of the Story it ſelf; but only upbraided the *Chriſtians* for attributing too much to *Chriſt*. 2. If there were really ſuch a Perſon as Chriſt was, who ſuffered as *Tacitus* ſaith, then the whole Story could not be a Fiction, but only ſome part of it; and theſe additional parts muſt either be contrived by the *Apoſtles*, or after their time: Not after their time, for

for then they must be added after *Christianity* was received in the World, for that, as appears by *Tacitus*, was spread in the *Apostles* times as far as *Rome*; and if these parts were not received with it; the Cheat would presently have been discover'd as soon as broached, by those who had embraced *Christianity* before: And besides, *Tertullian* in his time appeals to the *Authentick Writings* of the *Apostles* themselves, which were then extant, wherein the same things were contained, that we now believe: If these things then were forged, it must be by the *Apostles* themselves; and I dare now appeal to you, whether ever any Story was better capable of being disproved than this was, if it had not been true, since it was published in that very time and place, where the *Persons* were living, who were most concerned to disprove it: As appears

pears by the hatred of the *Jews* to the *Chriſtians*, both then and ever ſince: Which is a very obſervable Circumſtance for proving the *truth* of *Chriſtian Religion*; for the *Jews* and *Chriſtians* agreed in the *Divine Revelations* of old, the *Chriſtians* believed moreover, that *Chriſt* was the *Meſſias* promiſed; this *Chriſt* lived and dyed among the *Jews* his Enemies; his *Apoſtles* Preached, and wrought Miracles among their moſt inveterate Enemies, which Men that go about to deceive never care to do: And to this Day the *Jews* do not deny the *Matters* of *Fact*, but look on them as inſufficient to prove *Jeſus* of *Nazareth* to have been the *Meſſias*: Nay, *Mahomet* himſelf, who in all probability would have overthrown the whole Story of the *New Teſtament*, if he could have done it with any colour, yet ſpeaks very honourably of *Chriſt* and of the

the great things which were ſaid and done by him.

5. That there is nothing in the *Chriſtian Religion*, unbecoming the *Majeſty*, or *Holineſs*, or *Truth* of a *Divine Revelation*. As to the Precepts, *you acknowledge their Excellency*; and the *Promiſes* chiefly refer either to *divine Grace*, or *future Glory*; And what is there herein unbecoming *God?* And as to what concerns the *Truth* of it, we have as great Characters of that throughout, as it is poſſible for us to expect; there appearing ſo much ſimplicity, ſincerity, candour, and agreement in all the Parts of it. Some Men would have been better pleaſed, it may be, if it had been all written by one *Perſon*, and digeſted into a more exact Method, and ſet forth with all the Lights and Ornaments of Speech. This would have better become an Invention of Men, but not a

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Revelation of *God*: Plainneſs and Simplicity have a natural greatneſs above Art and Subtilty; and therefore *God* made choice of many to write, and at ſeveral times, that by comparing them we may ſee how far they were from contriving together, and yet how exactly they agree in all things which Men are concerned to believe. But you ſay, *We have many Infirmities of the* Apoſtles *diſcovered therein, their Heats and Animoſities one againſt another.* But I pray conſider; 1. How came you to know theſe things? Is it not by their own Writings? And if they had been ſuch, who minded only their Applauſe, had it not been as eaſie to have concealed theſe things? And would they not certainly have done it, if that had been their aim? If *St.* Paul *ſeems to boaſt*, doth he not do it, with that conſtraint to himſelf, as a Man that is forced

to

to do it for his own Vindication againſt malicious Enemies? And who ever denyed a Man of a generous Mind, the Liberty of ſpeaking for himſelf? 2. But ſuppoſe *they had Infirmities and Heats among them*; doth this prove that *God* could not make uſe of them as his Inſtruments, to declare his *Truth* to the World? Then it will follow, that *God* muſt never reveal his Will by *Men*, but by *Voices* from *Heaven*, or *Angels*, or the *Aſſumption* of the *Humane Nature by the Divine*. But, if *God* be denyed the Liberty of imploying meer Men, we cannot find ſo great Evidences of Piety and Zeal, of Humility and Self-denyal, of Patience and Magnanimity, of Innocency and univerſal Charity in any Men, as were in the *Apoſtles*; And therefore did appear with the moſt proper *Characters* of *Embaſſadors* from Heaven. And

I dare venture the compariſon of them with the beſt *Philoſophers*, as to the greateſt and moſt excellent *Virtues*, for which they were the moſt admired, notwithſtanding the mighty difference as to their Education; allowing but the ſame Truth as to the Story of the *New Teſtament*, which we yield to *Xenophon*, or *Diogenes Laertius*, or any other Writers concerning them.

But what is it then, which you object againſt the Writings of the *New Teſtament*, to make them inconſiſtent with the Wiſdom of God? I find but two things in the Papers you ſent me. 1. *Want of the continuance of the Power of Miracles, which you ſay is promiſed*, Mark 16. 17. 2. *The Number of the Beaſt in the Revelations.* But, Good Sir, conſider, what it is to call in queſtion, a Divine Revelation for ſuch Objections as theſe are? Muſt there be

be no Revelation, unleſs you underſtand every Prophecy, or the extent of every Promiſe? Be not ſo injurious to your own Soul, for the ſake of ſuch Objections, to caſt away the great Aſſurance which the *Chriſtian Religion* gives us, as to the Pardon of Sin upon Repentance here, and Eternal Happineſs in another World. Would you reject all the Writings of *Plato*, becauſe you do no more underſtand ſome part of his *Timæus* than the Number of *666*? You muſt have a very nice Faith, that can bare with no Difficulties at all, ſo that if there be but one or two hard things that you cannot digeſt, you muſt throw up all the beſt Food you have taken; at this rate you muſt ſtarve your Body, as well as ruin your Soul. But of theſe Places afterwards.

3. I have hitherto removed the Grounds of Suſpicion; I now come to ſhew the poſitive Teſtimonies

ſtimonies of their *Sincerity* which the *Apoſtles* ſhewed, which were greater than were ever given to any other Matter of Fact in the *World.* I will then ſuppoſe the whole *Truth* of the *Chriſtians Doctrin* to be reduced to this one Matter of Fact, Whether *Chriſt did riſe from the dead or no?* for (as I have ſaid already) it is plain, the *Apoſtles* put the main force of all that they ſaid upon the *Truth* of this; and often declared, that they were appointed to be the *Witneſſes* of this thing. Now let us conſider how it is poſſible for Men to give the higheſt aſſurance of their *Sincerity* to others; and that muſt be either by giving the utmoſt Teſtimony that Men can give; or by giving ſome Teſtimony above that of Men, which cannot deceive, which is the *Teſtimony of God.*

1. They gave the *utmoſt Teſtimony* that meer Men could give

of their *Fidelity*. I know no better way we have for a full assurance as to any humane Testimony, than to consider what those Circumstances are which are generally allowed to accompany Truth, and if we have the concurrence of all these, we have as much as can be expected: For nothing that depends on *Testimony* can be proved by *Mathematical Demonstration*. But notwithstanding the want of this, either we may have sufficient Ground to assent to *Truth* upon *Testimony*, or there can be no difference known between *Truth* and *Falshood* by *Humane Testimony*; which overthrows all Judicial Proceedings among Men; the *Justice* whereof doth suppose not only the *veracity* of *Humane Testimony*; But that it may be so discerned by others, that they may safely rely upon it. Now the main things to be regarded as to the *Truth* of

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Humane Teſtimony are theſe. 1. If Men teſtifie nothing but what they ſaw. 2. If they teſtifie it at no long diſtance of time from the Thing done. 3. If they teſtifie it plainly, and without doubtful Expreſſions. 4. If a great number agree in the ſame Teſtimony. 5. If they part with all that is valuable to Mankind, rather than deny the Truth of what they have teſtified: And where all theſe concur, it is hardly poſſible to ſuppoſe greater Evidence to be given of the *Truth* of a *Thing*; and now I ſhall ſhew that all theſe do exactly agree to the *Apoſtles Teſtimony*, concerning the *Reſurrection* of *Chriſt*.

1. They teſtified nothing but what they ſaw themſelves. The *Laws* of *Nations* do ſuppoſe that greater Credit is to be given to *Eye-Witneſſes*, than to any others; thence the Rule in the Civil Law, *Teſtimonium de auditu regulariter*

non valet: Becauſe, ſay the *Civilians* and *Canoniſts*, *Witneſſes are to teſtifie the Truth, and not barely the poſſibility of Things*; that which Men ſee, they can teſtifie whether they are or not: That which Men only hear, may be, or not be; and their *Teſtimony* is not of the *Fact*, but is looked on as more uncertain, and ought to have greater allowances given it; but the Apoſtles teſtified only *what they ſaw and handled*; and that after the moſt ſcrupulous Enquiry into the *Truth* of *Chriſts Body*, and after many *Doubts* and *Suſpicions* among themſelves about it; ſo that they did not ſeem haſtily and raſhly to believe what they afterwards declared to the World. Now a *Body* was a proper object of Senſe, and no tryal could be greater, or more accurate than theirs was; nor any ſatisfaction fuller than putting their *Fingers* into the very *Wounds* of the *pierced Side*. 2. They

2. They did not ſtay till the *Circumſtances* might have ſlipt out of their Memories, before they teſtified theſe Things; but very ſoon after, while the impreſſion of them was freſh upon them: If they had let theſe Matters alone for any long time, the *Jews* would have asked them preſently, If theſe things were true, why did we not hear of them as ſoon as they were done? Therefore we ſee the Apoſtles on the very Day of *Pentecoſt*, a little after *Chriſts Aſcenſion* to Heaven, openly and boldly declare the *Truth* of theſe things, not in private corners among a few *Friends*, but in the moſt ſolemn Meeting of their Nation from all Parts; which was the worſt time could have been choſen, if they had any intention to deceive.

3. They teſtifie it in as *plain a manner* as is poſſible, on purpoſe

to prevent all Miſtakes of their
Acts 2. 32. 36. meaning, *This Jeſus hath God raiſed up, whereof we all are Witneſſes; Therefore let all the Houſe of* Iſrael *know aſſuredly, that God hath made that ſame Jeſus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Chriſt.* Men that had a mind to deceive, would have uſed ſome more general and doubtful Words, than theſe were.

4. If this had been teſtified by one ſingle Witneſs, the World would have ſuſpected the Truth of his Teſtimony; for according to the Rule in the *Civil Law* in the caſe of *Teſtimony*, *Vox unius, vox nullius eſt:* But this was teſtified by very many; not meerly by the twelve Apoſtles, but by 500 at once; among whom ſome might be ſuppoſed to have ſo much Honeſty, or at leaſt capable of being perſwaded to have diſcovered the Impoſture, if they had in the leaſt ſuſpected any.

5. But

5. But that which adds the greateſt weight to all this, is, That there was not one of all the Apoſtles, and ſcarce any one of the reſt, but expoſed themſelves to the utmoſt *Hazards* and *Dangers*, rather than deny or retract the *Truth* of what they witneſſed. If the *People* had been careleſs and indifferent about *Religion*, it is poſſible Men might have gone on in a Lye ſo long till they had gotten *Intereſt* enough to maintain it; but no ſooner did the Apoſtles appear, witneſſing theſe Things, but they met with an early and vigorous oppoſition, and that from the chiefeſt Men in *Power*, who made it their buſineſs to ſuppreſs them. Now in this caſe, they were put to this choice, if they would renounce or conceal the *Truth* of what they teſtified they might preſently enjoy eaſe, and it may be, rewards too; but if they went on,

they muſt look for nothing but the ſharpeſt Perſecution; and this they met with almoſt in all Places; and is it conceivable, that Men ſhould be ſo *fond* of a *Lye*, to forſake all and follow it, and at laſt to take up their Croſs for it? If *Credit* and *Intereſt* in the Hearts of People, might carry a Man on a great way in the Deluſion, yet he would be loth to dye for it; and yet there was never a one of the Apoſtles, but ventured his Life for the *Truth* of this; and all but one, they tell us, did ſuffer Martyrdom for it. I pray, Sir, conſider, where you ever meet with any thing like this, that ſo many Men ſhould ſo reſolutely die, for what themſelves at the ſame time knew to be a Lie; and that they muſt certainly do, if it were all a contrivance of their own Heads.

2. But although in theſe things they went as high as it was poſ-

ſible

ſible for *Humane Teſtimony* to go, yet they had ſomething beyond all this, which was a *Concurrence* of a *Divine Teſtimony*, in the *miraculous Gifts* and *Operations* of the *Holy Ghoſt*. And this we aſſert to be the higheſt Teſtimony can be given in the World, of a *Truth* of any thing; becauſe *God* will not employ his *Power* to deceive the World. And as all other *Truth* hath a *Criterion* proper to it; ſo this ſeems to be the proper *Criterion* of a *Divine Teſtimony*, that it hath the *Power of Miracles* going along with it. For if we do ſuppoſe God to make known his Mind to the World, it is very reaſonable to believe there ſhould be ſome *diſtinguiſhing Note* of what is immediately from God, and what comes only from the *inventions* of *Men*; and what can be more proper to diſtinguiſh what comes from *God*, and what from *Men*, than to ſee thoſe things done

done which none but *God* can do? But againſt this you object ſeveral Things, which I ſhall eaſily and briefly Anſwer.

1. *You cannot tell what it is that Miracles do atteſt; not all their Doctrin, ſince* Paul *ſaid, ſome was not from the Lord.* Anſw. *Miracles* do atteſt the *veracity* of the *Speaker*, and by conſequence the *Truth* of the *Doctrin*; *not that you ſhould believe that to be from the Lord, which he ſaid was not*; but that which he ſaid, was from the Lord. But when he makes ſuch a diſtinction himſelf, it is very unreaſonable to urge that as an Argument, that he had *nothing from the Lord*; it is much rather an Argument of his Candor and Ingenuity, that he would not pretend to *Divine Revelation*, when he had it not.

2. *You would have it ſignified, what Doctrin it is which is atteſted by Miracles, ſince the Doctrins of Scri-*

Scriptue lye in Heaps and Confuſion. *Anſw.* To what purpoſe ſhould any Doctrins be ſingled out to have the *Seal* of *Miracles* ſet to them, ſince it is their *Divine Commiſſion* to Teach and Declare the *Will* of *God*, which is *ſealed* by it? And what they did ſo Teach and Declare, is eaſily known by their Writings.

3. *But why do not Miracles ſtill continue?* *Anſw.* Becauſe there are no Perſons employ'd to Teach any *new Doctrines*; and no Promiſe of *Scripture* doth imploy any more: For the *Signs* which were to follow them that believe, were ſuch as tended to the firſt confirmation of the *Chriſtian Faith*; which being effected, their uſe ceaſed; and ſo to ask why God doth not continue a Gift of *Miracles* to convince Men that the former were true, is to the ſame purpoſe as to ask why *God* doth not

not make a *New Sun*, to satisfie *Athiests* that he made the *Old?*

4. *But doth not the Scripture say, That Wonders are not always to be taken as Confirmations of the Truth of Doctrin, since false Prophets may work Wonders*, Deuteron. 13. 1. *Answ.* That signifies no more, than that *Wonders* are not to be believed against the Principles of *Natural Religion*; or Revealed *Religion* already confirmed by *greater Miracles:* And that those who would value such a particular *Sign* above all the *series* of *Miracles* their *Religion* was first established by, may be justly left to their own *Delusions.* You might as well object the lying Wonders of the *Man of Sin*, against all the *Miracles* of *Christ* and his *Apostles.* If God hath once done enough to convince Men, he may afterwards justly leave them to the tryal of their Ingenuity; as a Father that hath used great

care

care to make his Son underſtand *true Coin*, may afterwards ſuffer *falſe* to be laid before him, to try whether he will mind his being Cheated or no?

5. But you may yet farther demand, *What the Teſtimony of Miracles doth ſignifie to the Writings of the New Teſtament? Anſw.* 1. The Miracles do ſufficiently prove the *Authority* of that Doctrin, which was delivered by thoſe who wrought *Miracles*; as *Chriſt* and his *Apoſtles*. 2. If there had been the leaſt Ground to queſtion the *Truth* and *Authority* of theſe *Writings*, they had never been ſo univerſally received in thoſe *Ages*, when ſo many were concerned to enquire into the *Truth* of theſe things; for we ſee ſeveral of the *Books* were a long time examined, and at laſt, when no ſufficient Reaſon could be brought againſt them, they were received by thoſe *Churches*, which

which at firſt ſcrupled the receiving them: And I am ſo far from thinking the *Doubts* of the firſt *Ages*, any Argument againſt the *Authority* of a *Book*, that by the Objections of ſome againſt ſome of them, I am thereby aſſured, that they did not preſently receive any *Book*, becauſe it went under the Name of an *Apoſtolical Writing*: As I am the more confirmed in the belief of the *Reſurrection* of *Chriſt*, becauſe ſome of the *Diſciples* were at firſt very *doubtful* about it.

6. You may yet ask, *What doth all this ſignifie to the Writings of the Old Teſtament, which were written at a longer diſtance of Time from us, and in a more Ignorant Age of the World?* Anſw. There cannot be a *more* evident Proof of the *Old Teſtament*, than by the *New*: For if the *New* be *true*, the *Old* muſt be ſo, which

was

was confirmed ſo plainly and evidently by it; our *Saviour* and his *Apoſtles* appealing to *Moſes* and the *Prophets* on all occaſions. So that the ſame *Miracles* which prove their *Teſtimony* true, do at the ſame time prove the *Divine Authority* of the *Old Teſtament*, ſince it is ſo expreſly ſaid in the *New*, *That Holy Men of God did Speak as they were moved by the Holy Ghoſt.*

But after all this, You urge, That you have diſcover'd ſuch things in theſe Writings, as could not come from God; as

1. *Contradictions in them.* 2. *Some things inconſiſtent with the Wiſdom of God.* 3. *Promiſes made that were never fulfilled.* 4. *Things ſo obſcure as no one can tell the meaning of them.* Under theſe four Heads, I ſhall examine the particular Allegations you bring againſt the *Scriptures.*

1. Under

1. Under the Head of *Contradictions*, you insist on the *Prophecy* Gen. 15. 13, 14, 15, 16. *made to* Abraham *concerning his Posterity*; *compared with the Accomplishment mentioned*, Exod. 12. 40, 41. And the force of your Argument lyes in this, *That the Prophecy in* Genesis *doth imply that the Servitude of the Children of* Israel *in* Egypt *was to be* 400 *Years*; *or* 430 *saith* Exod. *but both these are repugnant to other places of Scripture, which make their abode in* Egypt *not to exceed* 215 *Years*; *or at the highest, by the number of Generations, could not exceed* 350 *Years*, *stretching them to the utmost advantage.* To this, which you lay so much Weight upon, I Answer distinctly,

1. By your own Confession, supposing the 430 Years to begin from the *Covenant* made with *Abraham*, the accomplishment mentioned, *Exod.* 12. 40. doth fall

fall out exactly in the time of the *Childeren* of *Iſraels* going out of *Egypt*, for you have proved from *Scripture*, that from the *Covenant* with *Abraham* to *Jacobs* being in *Egypt*, were 215 Years; to which you add, *that* Coath *being ſuppoſed* 5 *Years Old at the going into* Egypt; *and that at* 70 *Years he Begat* Amram, *and that* Amram *at* 70 *Begat* Moſes, *to which* Moſes *his* 80 *Years being added, makes up the other* 215 *Years, whereby we have the full* 430 *Years, by your own Computation.* Now, Sir, I pray conſider what reaſon you have to charge the *Scripture* with contradiction in a Matter your ſelf acknowledges, ſo exactly accompliſhed in this way of *Computation.*

2. But you ſay, *The Words will not bear this; becauſe they ſpeak of the* 400 *Years to expire in their Servitude in* Egypt. Anſw. For this we muſt conſi-

der the importance of the Words both in *Geneſis* and *Exodus*. There is not a Word of *Egypt* mentioned in *Geneſis*; but only in general it is ſaid, *Thy Seed ſhall be a Stranger in the Land that is not theirs, and ſhall ſerve them, and they ſhall afflict them* 400 *Years*; and it will conduce very much to the right underſtanding this *Prophecy* to conſider the main Scope and Deſign of it, which was not to tell *Abraham* how long they ſhould be in *Servitude* to the *Egyptians*, but how long it would be before his Seed ſhould come to the *Poſſeſſion* of the promiſed *Land*; And it ſeems *Abraham* by the *Queſtion*, Gen. 15. 7. 8. did expect to have the Inheritance of this Land *in his own time*: To this therefore *God* Anſwers, by telling him, he meant no ſuch thing, but it was intended for *his Seed*, and that not ſuddenly neither, for

for they were to tarry *till the Iniquity of the* Amorites *ſhould be full*, which would not be till the *fourth Generation*; and then *his Seed ſhould after* 400 *Years, come to the Poſſeſſion of the Promiſed Land; but in the mean time they were to ſojourn in a Land that was not theirs, and to meet with many Hardſhips and Difficulties.* This is plainly the Scope of this *Prophecy*, and by attending to it, the great Objections preſently appear without force; for the *Land* of *Canaan* notwithſtanding the Promiſe, was by the *Patriarchs* themſelves looked on as a *Land* wherein they were *Strangers.* So *Abraham* ſaith *Gen.* 23. 4. *I am a Stranger and a Sojourner with you*; and which is more remarkable in the bleſſing of *Jacob* by *Iſaac*, to whom the *Promiſe* was made, it is ſaid; *And give thee the Bleſſing of* Abraham *to thee, and to thy Seed, that thou mayeſt inherit the Land wherein*

thou art a Stranger, which God gave unto Abraham, *Gen.* 28. 4. Where the very same Word is used concerning *Jacob*, that is expressed in the Prophecy, *Gen.* 15. 13. So that the *Patriarchs* looked on themselves as *Strangers in the Land of* Canaan, so long after the *promise* made, and after the *increase* of the *Seed* of *Abraham:* And therefore the *Land* of *Canaan* was called *Terra Peregrinationum*, the *Land* wherein they were *Strangers*; Gen. 36. 7. —— 37. 1. And when *God* was calling the People of *Israel* together out of *Egypt*, yet then the *Land* of *Canaan* was called by the very same Title, the *Land of their Pilgrimage, wherein they were Strangers*, *Exod.* 6. 4. And *Ps.* 105. 9, 10, 11, 12, 13. where we have a full account of the *Promise* made to *Abraham*, *Isaac*, and *Jacob*, concerning the *Inheritance* of that *Land* it is said, *That they were*

were few, and Strangers in it, when they went from one Nation to another, from one Kingdom to another People. Which doth fully explain the meaning of the *Prophecy* in *Geneſis*, and that it is not to be reſtrained to the *ſervitude* of the *People* of *Iſrael* in *Egypt*, but to be underſtood of their *ſtate* of *Pilgrimage* for 400 Years, wherein they were to ſuffer great Hardſhips, before they ſhould come to the Inheritance of *Canaan*. *This is no forced or unnatural Expoſition of the Words*, as you ſeem to ſuggeſt; but to my apprehenſion, very plain and eaſie, if we attend to the main Scope and Deſign of them which was to acquaint *Abraham* how long it would be before the *Prophecy* were accompliſhed, and what the condition of his Seed ſhould be the mean time, *viz.* *That they ſhould have no Land which they ſhould call their own by Inheritance*

all that time, but they ſhould be expoſed to great Hardſhips, yea even to Servitude; but that Nation whom they ſhould ſerve, ſhould at laſt ſuffer for their ill uſage of them, and they ſhould come out of that Captivity with great Subſtance; and all this to be done in the fourth Generation of the Amorites *when ther Iniquities ſhould be arrived at the full height.* All which Particulars, were ſo remarkably accompliſhed at ſuch a diſtance of time, and under ſuch improbable Circumſtances, that this very *Prophecy* were enough to convince an unprejudiced Mind, that it came from Divine Inſpiration. For where do we meet with any thing like this in the Hiſtories of other Nations? *viz.* A Prophecy to be accompliſhed 400 Years after, and the very manner foretold, which no humane Conjecture could reach to, ſince the manner of deliverance

of

of the *People* of *Iſrael* out of their Captivity in *Egypt*, was to all humane appearance ſo impoſſible a thing, eſpecially at ſuch a time when the *Spirits* of the People were ſunk and broken by ſo long a Slavery: And not only the manner foretold, but the accompliſhment happened to a Day, according to *Exodus* 12. 41. *And it came to paſs at the end of the* 430 *Years, even the ſelf-ſame day it came to paſs, that all the Hoſts of the Lord went out from the Land of* Egypt. But againſt this you object, *That the ſojourning is ſpoken of the Children of* Iſrael *in* Egypt *for* 430 *Years; which cannot hold good any ways; ſince, to make it up, the times of* Abraham, Iſaac, *and* Jacob, *muſt be taken in, who could not be called the Children of* Iſrael. *Anſw.* For the 430 Years, I grant, that according to St. *Paul*, they did commence from the

Covenant made to *Abraham* Gal. 3. 17. and that the 400 Years began from *Iſaac*'s being owned for the *Promiſed Seed*; between which time the 30 Years were paſſed; and all appearance of difficulty is avoided, if we admit the reading of the beſt Copies of the *LXX.* which is in theſe words, Ἡ δὲ παροίκησις τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ, ἣν παρῴκησαν ἐν γῇ Αἰγύπτῳ, καὶ ἐν γῇ Χαναὰν, αὐτοὶ καὶ οἱ πατέρες αὐτῶν ἔτη τετρακόσια τριάκοντα, *Now the ſojourning of the Children of* Iſrael *who dwelt in* Egypt *and* Canaan, *they and their Fathers was* 430 *Years.* This is the reading of our *Alexandrian* Copy, and the *Complutenſian*, and that of *Aldus*, and of *Euſebius* in his *Chronicon*, and of S. *Hierom* in his Tranſlation of it; and of the *Church* in St. *Auguſtin*'s time, and afterwards; and leſt any ſhould reject this as a late Interpolation, or Gloſs received into the Text, beſides theſe

theſe Teſtimonies of the Antiquity of it, we find the very ſame in the *Samaritan* Copy, which the Enemies of it do allow to be as ancient as our *Saviours* time. And that which very much confirms the Truth of this reading, is, That the *Jews* themſelves follow the ſenſe of it, who are the moſt eager Contenders for the *Authority* of the *Hebrew* Copy; who all agree, that the beginning of the Computation of the 430 Years is to be taken before the *Children* of *Iſraels* going into *Egypt*: And *Menaſſeh Ben Iſrael* contends, with many others, that the 430 Years did begin from the *Promiſe* made to *Abraham*; and the 400 from the time of *Iſaac*, to which their moſt ancient *Books* of *Chronology* do agree; and to the ſame purpoſe ſpeak both *Philo Judeas*, and *Joſephus*; who although in one place he ſeems to make *the* Iſraelites *Af-*

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fliction in Egypt *to have been* 400 *Years*, yet when he ſpeaks more particularly of it, *he makes the time of their abode in* Egypt *to have been only* 215, *and the* 430 *to begin from* Abrahams *entrance into* Canaan: The *Targum* of *Jonathan* begins the 430 from the Viſion of *Abraham*, and the 400 from the Birth of *Iſaac*; all which I mention, to let you ſee that the *Jews* themſelves do in ſenſe concur with the *Samaritan* and *Greek* Copy; and therefore we have more reaſon to ſuſpect ſomething left out in the preſent *Hebrew*, than any thing added in thoſe Copies. *But doth not this take off from the Authority of the Scripture?* Not at all: For the only Queſtion is about the True Reading: And having the conſent of the *Samaritan*, *Alexandrian*, and other Copies of the *LXX.* and of the Ancient *Church*;

Church; and of the *Jews* themſelves as to the ſenſe of it, we have reaſon to look on this as the truer Reading: Which is making no addition to the *Scripture* either as to Perſons or Places, but only producing the more Authentick Copy; much leſs is this Adding or Changing as we pleaſe, for if we did this without ſo much Authority as we have for it, you might as eaſily reject it as we produce it.

3. After all this, I do not ſee the mighty force of your Reaſon to charge the Scripture with Contradiction, ſuppoſing *the* 400 *Years were to be ſpent in the ſervitude of the Children of* Iſrael *in* Egypt. I confeſs, when I found the *Scripture* ſo boldly, ſo frequently charged with no leſs than Contradiction, I expected ſomething like Demonſtration in the Caſe, eſpecially in this place which

which you choſe to put in the Front of all; but I do not find any thing like ſuch a proof of a Contradiction, ſuppoſing we ſhould allow the 400 Years to be ſpent in *Egypt*. Yes, ſay you, Coath *was 5 Years Old when he came down into* Egypt, *and When he had lived there 65 Years he begat* Amram, *and* Amram *being 70 Years Old begat* Moſes, *to which* Moſes *his 80 Years being added, we have only 215 Years.* But ſince the *Scripture* doth not aſſign, the particular Age of any of theſe, when they begat their Children, I ſee no impoſſibility or repugnancy in the Suppoſition, that 400 Years ſhould paſs from *Levi*'s going into *Egypt*, to the Eightieth of *Moſes*, any more than from *Salmons* entrance into *Canaan* to the *time* of *David*; for no more are reckoned in *Scripture* than *Boaz* the Son of *Salmon*, by *Raab*,

Raab, and *Obed*, and *Jeſſe*; So that by the ſame way, this latter may be explained, the former may be ſo too. If it be ſaid, *That either they begat their Children at a great Age, or that the Scripture in Genealogies doth not ſet down all the intermediate Parents, but only the moſt eminent, (as* Caleb *is called the Son of* Eſron. 1 Chron. 2. 9, 18. *although there was at leaſt one between them,)* the very ſame Anſwer will ſerve to clear this part of the *Chronology* of *Scripture* from any appearance of Contradiction. Theſe things you might have found more largely deduced and fully handled by thoſe Learned Perſons, who have undertaken to clear the *Chronology* of *Scripture*: Who were Men of more Judgment, than from any difficulty of this Nature, to call in queſtion the *Truth* and *Authority* of the *ſacred Scriptures*; and although

though the Opinions of *Chronologers*, are like the City-Clocks, which ſeldom agree, yet ſome come nearer the time of the Day than others do; and therefore you ought to examine and compare them before you pronounce ſo peremptorily about Contradictions in *Scripture*, which you have no reaſon to do till you find that no one *Hypotheſis* among them, will ſerve to free the *Scripture* from Contradiction: For otherwiſe, you do but blame the *Sun*, becauſe you cannot make the Clocks agree.

This is all I can find in your Papers under the *Head* of Contradictions; and I leave you now ſoberly to conſider, whether this Place did afford you ſufficient Ground for ſo heavy a Charge: But if you ſay, *You have a great many more by you, but you ſent me this only for a Tryal of my Skill*; before you ſend any

any more; I beſeech you, Sir, to conſider,

1. How eaſily things do appear to be Contradictions to weak, or unſtudied, or prejudiced Minds, which after due Conſideration appear to be no ſuch things. A deep prejudice finds a Contradiction in every thing; whereas in *Truth*, nothing but ill Will, and impatience of conſidering, made any thing, it may be, which they quarrel at, appear to be ſo. If I had been of ſuch a quarrelſome Humour, I would have undertaken to have found out more Contradictions in your Papers, than you imagine, and yet you might have been confident, you had been guilty of none at all. When I conſider the great Pains, and Learning, and Judgment, which hath been ſhewn by the *Chriſtian Writers* in the Explication of the

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ptures; and the raw, indigeſted Objections which ſome love to make againſt them, if I were to judge of things barely by the fitneſs of Perſons to judge of them, the diſproportion between theſe, would appear out of all compariſon. A modeſt Man would in any thing of this nature ſay with himſelf, Methinks, if there were ſuch Contradictions in the *Bible*, as now ſeem to me; ſo many Perſons of incomparable Abilities in the Firſt, and latter Ages of the *Chriſtian* Church, who have made it their Buſineſs to enquire into theſe Things, would have diſcerned them before me: And yet they retained a mighty veneration for the *Scriptures*, as coming from God himſelf; and therefore it may be only weakneſs of Judgment, want of Learning, or ſome ſecret Prejudice, may make me ſuſpect theſe things; or elſe I muſt ſuſ-

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pect the honesty of all those Persons who have pretended such a Devotion to the Scriptures, and yet have believed them full of Contradictions.

2. *Wherein* the Contradiction appears. Is it in the main and weighty parts of the *Religion* revealed herein; or is it only in some smaller Circumstances as to time and place? The great thing you are to look after, are the Matters those *Scriptures* tell you your Salvation depends upon; and if there be a full consent, and agreement therein; you find enough for you to believe and practice. And if some Contradictions should still appear to you in smaller Matters, what follows from thence, but only that the same care was not taken about little, as about great Things? And you ought to set that appearance of Contradiction in small Matters, to-

gether with the real conſent in the Things of the higheſt importance; and from thence rather to infer, that this was no combination or deſign to deceive others; for ſuch Perſons take the greateſt care to prevent Suſpicion, by their exactneſs in every minute Circumſtance; and ſometimes the over-much care to prevent Suſpicion doth raiſe it the more.

3. *What ways* have been uſed by Men of Judgment and Learning, to clear thoſe places from the charge of Contradiction. For, not one of the Objections you can ſtart now, but hath been conſidered over and over; and all the difficulties that belong to it examined; If you will not take the pains to do this, it is plain you do not deſire Satisfaction, but only ſeek for a pretence to cavil; eſpecially, if you only ſearch the weakeſt or moſt in-

injudicious Writers on the Scriptures, and endeavour to expoſe their Opinions, without taking notice of what others have ſaid with more clear and evident Reaſon. This ſhews either want of Judgment in chooſing ſuch Expoſitors, or want of Candor and fair Dealing and a deſire of taking any advantage againſt the Scriptures.

4. How hard a Matter it is for us at this diſtance to underſtand exactly the grounds of *Chronology*, or the manner of computation of Times uſed ſo long ago: And therefore in all dffiiculties of this nature, we ought to make the faireſt allowances that may be, conſidering withal, that Eſcapes and Errors are no where more eaſily committed by Tranſcribers, than in *numbers*: And that it is a very unreaſonable thing, that a *Book*, otherwiſe deſerving to be

thought the beſt *Book* in the World, ſhould be Scorned and Rejected, becauſe there appears ſome difference in the *computation* of *Times*. We do not ſo exactly know the manner of the *Hebrew Chronology*, nor, the nature of their Year, or Intercalations, nor the Cuſtoms of their *Genealogies*, nor the allowance to be made for *Interregnums*, ſo as to be able to define peremptorily in theſe Things; but it is ſufficient to ſhew, that there is no improbability in the accounts that are given; and no ſufficient Reaſon can be drawn from thence to reject the Authority of the *Scriptures*,

2. I come to conſider the places you object, *as containing Things inconſiſtent with the Wiſdom or Goodneſs of God, according to a rational Perſwaſion*, and thoſe are either, 1. *From the Laws of* Moſes. 2. *From the expreſs Story of the*

the Bible, or Actions of the Prophets.

1. *From the Laws of* Moſes: Your *firſt Objection* is from *Exod.* 41. 7. *Where a Man is ſuppoſed to ſell his Daughter; which you ſay, it is incredible to believe that God ſhould permit; becauſe it implies unnatural Affection and Covetouſneſs in the Father.* But, Sir, 1. You do not conſider, that this is barely a *proviſional Law*, and is not the *Permiſſion* of the Thing, ſo much as the *Regulation* of it, ſuppoſing it to be done, *i. e.* in caſe a Man ſhould part with his Intereſt in his Daughter to another Perſon, upon an extraordinary caſe of neceſſity, as the *Jews* underſtand it; yet then, ſhe was not to be in the condition of a Servant, but to be either Bretrothed to the Perſon who receiv'd her, or to his Son; which was intended for the reſtraint of promiſcuous

Buying and Selling Daughters, meerly for the ſatisfaction of Luſt. The *Jews*, who certainly beſt underſtood their own Judicial *Laws*, do ſay, that this was never to be done, but where there was a preſumption of ſuch a *Betrothing*; for no Man could Sell his Daughter to thoſe to whom it was unlawful for her to *Marry* by their *Law*; ſo that this was looked on as a kind of *Eſpouſals* of a young Girl, taken into Wardſhip by another; but ſo, that if ſhe were not Betrothed, ſhe was to remain her ſix Years during her Minority, as the *Jews* underſtand it; unleſs ſhe were redeemed, or ſet Free, or the *Jubile* came, or the Maſter dyed, or the time of her Minority expired.

2. The caſe of *Neceſſity* being ſuppoſed, it hath been thought lawful for *Parents* to make advantage by their *Children*, not only

only by the *Jews*, but by other Nations, who have been in the greateſt eſteem for Wiſdom. For by the *Law* of the twelve *Tables*, among the *Romans*, the *Father* had the liberty of Selling his Son three times, for his own advantage, as *Dionyſ. Halicarnaſſeus* relates; and before that time, it was not only in uſe among the *Romans*, but in ſuch eſteem among them, that upon the review of their Laws the *Decemviri* durſt not leave it out; but by one of the *Laws* of *Numa Pompilius*, it was reſtrained to the times before Marriage, for in caſe the *Son* had the *Fathers* conſent to Marry, he could not Sell him afterwards, as the ſame *Author* tells us. This *Law* continued in force among them, till *Chriſtianity* prevailed in the *Roman Empire*, for although there were a Prohibition of *Dioclecian* againſt

it, yet that ſignified nothing, till *Conſtantine* took care, *That ſuch indigent Parents ſhould be relieved out of the publick Charge*, Cod. Theodoſ. l. 11. tit. 27. 2. And yet after this, the Cuſtom did continue, when the *Parents* were in great want, as appears by a *Law* of *Theodoſius*, Cod. 3. tit. 3. *Omnes quos Parentum miſeranda fortuna in ſervitium dum victum requirunt addixit, ingenuitati priſtinæ reformentur.* And it further appears, that even in *Conſtantine*'s time, notwithſtanding the Law made by him, *Parents* would ſtill, when they thought themſelves overcharged with Children, part with their Intereſt in them to others for advantage, but it was chiefly while they were *Sanguinolenti*, as the Law expreſſes it, *i. e. new Born. Cod. Theod. l. 5. tit. 8.* By the Laws of *Athens*, before *Solons* time, Parents might ſell their

their Children, as appears by *Plutarch*, in his Life; and the ſame *Philoſtratus* reports of the *Phrygians*, *l.* 3. *vit. Apollon. Tyan.* and the like Cuſtom doth obtain among the *Chineſes* to this Day, if Perſons do think themſelves unable to bring up their *Children* themſelves. And there are two things to be ſaid for it. 1. The natural obligation lying on Children to provide for their Parent in neceſſity, by any way they are able. 2. The probability of better Education under more able Perſons; and therefore the *Thebans* had a Law, *That* Parents *in caſe of Poverty, were to bring their* Children *to the Magiſtrate, as ſoon as they were Born, who put them out to ſuch as were judged fit to bring them up, and to have their Service for their Reward.* *Ælian. v. hiſt. l.* 2. *c.* 7.

But however, you ſay, *This place implys a toleration of having many*

many Wives, becauſe it is ſaid, if he take him another Wife, v. 10. I do not deny, that the *Moſaical* Law did ſuppoſe the practice of *Polygamy*; but as it doth no where expreſsly allow it, neither doth it expreſsly condemn it. And although we ſay, the *Chriſtian Law* is far more Excellent, which reduceth Marriage to its firſt Inſtitution; yet you will find it a hard Matter to prove ſuch a permiſſion of *Polygamy* as this was, to be ſo repugnant to the *Law* and Principles of *Nature*, as from thence to infer, that this *Law* of *Moſes*, could not be from *God*: You might have ſaid the ſame about the Matter of *Divorce*, which was permitted them; *Chriſt* ſaith, *for the hardneſs of their Hearts:* Which ſhews, that *God* doth not always require that from Men which is beſt pleaſing to himſelf; and that as to his

his *Political Government*, he may not always puniſh that, which is not ſo pleaſing to him.

The next Law you quarrel at is that, *Deut.* 22. 13, *&c. About the tryal of Virginity:* Which you object againſt, *as immodeſt and uncertain, and therefore unbecoming the Wiſdom of God.* So, many Cuſtoms of thoſe elder times of the World, and of the *Eaſtern* parts to this Day ſeem very ſtrange to us, that are not ſo well acquainted with the *Reaſons* of them. Methinks, it better becomes our *Modeſty* in ſuch caſes, to queſtion our underſtanding thoſe Cuſtoms, than preſently to caſt ſo much diſparagement on the Author of them. If you had been offended at the literal ſenſe of thoſe Words, many of the *Jews* themſelves ſay, they are to be underſtood figuratively of the evidence that was to be brought

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and laid open before the *Judges*, on behalf of the defamed Perſon. And both *Joſephus* and *Philo* omit the laying open the Cloth. But ſuppoſing it to be taken in the plaineſt literal Senſe, I have Two Things to ſay in vindication of this Law. 1. That however uncertain ſome *Phyſitians* have thought that way of Tryal to have been in theſe parts of the World; yet it is generally agreed to have held for the *Eaſtern* parts, by the moſt skilful *Phyſitians* among the *Arabians*: And a Cuſtom of the ſame nature is ſaid by good Authors to have been obſerved among the *Egyptians*, and other *Africans*, as well as the *Arabians*; ſo that this could not be thought ſo ſtrange or immodeſt among the Inhabitants of thoſe Parts: And it is very probable that ſome Particulars, as to the Practice of theſe *Laws* are not ſet down

down, which might very much tend to the certainty of them, as the Age of the Married Perſons, which was moſt likely then, as it is to this Day in the *Eaſtern* parts, very early, the *Jews* ſay, at twelve Years Old, which would make the Tryal more certain. 2. As to the Modeſty of it, you are to conſider, that the *Law* was intended to keep Perſons from unjuſt *Defamations*, and ſuch a way of *Tryal* was therefore pitched upon to deter Perſons from ſuch *Defamations*; which Men might otherwiſe have been more ready to, becauſe of the *Liberty* of *Divorce*, and the advantage they had in ſaving the *Dower*, if they could prove the Party vitiated before Marriage; therefore all the proof of that Nature was to be paſſed ſoon after the conſummation of Marriage, which being agreed then by all the Friends,

Friends, there was to be no liberty left for Defamation afterwards; but in caſe any Man ſhould be guilty of it, the producing thoſe Evidences, which before they were agreed upon, ſhould be ſufficient to clear the Innocency of the Party accuſed. And therefore I look on this *Law*, as the *Jews* do on that of the *rebellious Son*, of which they ſay, that there is no inſtance of the practice of it; the Penalty threatned being ſo effectual to prevent the occaſion of it.

And ſuch in a great Meaſure, I ſuppoſe the other *Law* mentioned by you to have been, *viz. of the Water of Jealouſy*, which you make ſo ſtange a matter of; and think it *ſavours too much of a deſign to gratifie the jealous Humour of the Jewiſh Nation:* But you might have put a fairer Conſtruction upon it, *viz.* That it was in-

intended to prevent any occaſion of Suſpicion being given to the Husband, by too much familiarity with other Perſons; ſince the Law allowed ſo ſevere a Trial, in Caſe the Wife after admonition did not forbear ſuch ſuſpected Familiarity, but if you had looked on the Law, as it is, Num. 5. 12, 13. *&c.* you would have found, that the deſign of it was to keep Women from committing *ſecret Adultery*, by ſo ſevere a Penalty; yet withal allowing ſo much to a reaſonable Suſpicion, (for ſo the *Jews* underſtand it, with many Cautions and Limitations) that rather then Married Perſons ſhould live under perpetual Jealouſies, he appointed this extraordinary way of Tryal, whereby Adultery was moſt ſeverely puniſhed, and the honour of Innocency publickly vindicated; which certainly are not ends at all unbecoming

becoming due Conceptions of God.

The laſt of the *Jewiſh Laws*, which you quarrel with is *the prohibition of Uſury, in ſeveral places of Moſes his Law and the Pſalms:* And from hence you fall into a long Diſcourſe *to prove the lawfulneſs of Uſury*: But to what purpoſe I beſeech you? For you were to prove, that *God* could never forbid it; you might have ſpared *your pity for Men*, as you think, *blinded with Superſtition, and cheated with New and Aery Notions:* For by all that I can ſee by theſe Papers, ſome pretended Enemies to *Superſtition* have no better Eyes than their Neighbours, and are as eaſily cheated with groundleſs Fancies and Aery Imaginations. The only thing to the Buſineſs in that long Diſcourſe is this, *That you cannot imagine that God ſhould make a Law ſo much to*

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Mans inconvenience, and forbid him ſo nice and indifferent a Thing, as moderate Increaſe of Profit by letting out of Mony, when it is allowed upon Lands, Houſes, and Trade, &c. To this I Anſwer, That the prohibition of *Uſury*, to the *Jewiſh Nation*, was upon *political Grounds* peculiar to theConſtitution of that *People*; as appears by the Words of the Law, *Deut.* 23. 19, 20. *Thou ſhalt not lend to Uſury unto thy Brother — Unto a Stranger thou maiſt lend upon Uſury*; but none of the *Laws* which are founded upon Common and Moral Reaſons have ſuch Limitations as this; for God would never have ſaid, *Thou ſhalt not commit Adultery with thy Brothers Wife*; but *with the Wife of a Stranger thou maiſt.* But there was this particular Reaſon, for the prohibition of *Uſury* to the *Jewiſh Nation*: It pleaſed God to fix their Habita-

tion, not upon the Sea-ſide, as *Tyre* and *Sidon* ſtood; but within Land where they had no conveniencies of Trading, but the Riches of the *Nation* lay in *Agriculture* and *Paſturage:* In which the Returns of Mony are neither ſo quick nor ſo advantageous to make ſufficient compenſation for the Intereſt of the Mony in the time they have it: For the main thing valuable in Mony is the advantage the Borrower makes of it; and where that is great, it ſeems reaſonable that the Perſon whoſe the Mony is, ſhould have a proportionable Share of the advantage made by it; but where Perſons borrow only for preſent Occaſions to ſupply their Neceſſities, there it is only an Act of Kindneſs to Lend, and it would be unreaſonable to preſs upon, or take Advantage by anothers Neceſſities. And this ſeems to have been the caſe among

among the *Jews*; they were only the Poor that wanted Mony for preſent Neceſſities; the Rich had no way to imploy it in Trading, unleſs that they lent to the *Tyrian Merchants*, which it was lawful by their Law to do; now if they took *Uſury* of their own People, it muſt be of thoſe whoſe urgent neceſſity, and not hopes of a mighty increaſe by it made them Borrow, and therefore it was a very juſt and reaſonable *Law* to forbid *Uſury* among them: Which I believe he would never have done, if he had placed the *Jews* upon the Coaſts of *Phœnicia*, where Trading was ſo much in requeſt.

Theſe are all the *Laws* which you have picked out of the *whole* Body of the *Jewiſh Law*, to repreſent it unbecoming the *Wiſdom of God:* And now I pray Sir, look back again upon them,

ſee how few, how ſmall, how weak your Objections are; and compare them with the *Weight*, and *Juſtice*, and *Prudence*, and *Piety*, Expreſſed in all the reſt, and I hope you will find cauſe to be aſhamed of ſpeaking ſo harſhly of thoſe *Laws*, ſo well accommodated to thoſe Ages of the World, and the Condition of that *People* for whom they were appointed.

2. I now conſider what you object againſt the *Story* of the *Bible*.

1. *That Paſſage of* Moſes, Exod. 32. 32. *Blot me out of thy Book which thou haſt written*: Where your Deſign is to ſhew *that* Moſes *prayed to be damned, and that this was a very irrational Thing: And ſavouring more of Paſſion than of the Spirit of God.* But what if *Moſes* meant no ſuch thing as Damnation? As there is not any Word in the Context re-

relating that ways, but all the deſign of that Chapter is about a Temporal Puniſhment, which was a preſent Deſtruction of the People for their Sins. And the Book out of which he prayed *God to blot him*, ſeems to me to be no other, than the Roll of *Gods choſen People, who were to poſſeſs the Land of* Canaan: For ſo ספר properly ſignifies a *Roll* or *Regiſter*. *Pſalm* 69. 28. We meet with ספר חיים *the Roll of the living, or the Book of the living* we render it, becauſe all ancient *Books* were in the faſhion of *Rolls*. In that Chapter, *Moſes* interceeds with *God* on behalf of the People, that he would make good his Promiſe to them, of bringing them into the *Land of* Canaan. *v.* 13. and *v.* 30. He goes up to make an Atonement for the People, i. e. *as to the cutting them off in the Wilderneſs*, and

therefore he deſires rather than the People ſhould be deſtroy'd, *that God would ſtrike him out of the Roll, that he might Dye in the Wilderneſs rather than the People:* And God gives that Anſwer to this purpoſe, v. 33. *Whoever hath ſinned againſt me, will I blot out of my Book*; the ſenſe of which is the ſame with thoſe Words of the *Pſalmiſt*, *He ſware in his wrath that they ſhould not enter into his Reſt. Pſal.* 95. 11. And according to this Interpretation, which is moſt natural and eaſie, all your long Diſcourſe *againſt praying to be Damned* comes to juſt nothing; there being no pretence for it, either in the Text or Context.

2. The *Story* of *Ruth* doth not pleaſe you, *as ſavouring in your Opinion of a great deal of Immodeſty*; but you would have a better Opinion of it, if you conſider that the reaſon of her Carriage to-

towards *Boaz*, in ſuch a manner, was upon *Naomies* telling her, *That he was one to whom the right of Redemption did belong, and by conſequence*, by their Law, *was to Marry her.* *Ruth* 2. 20. And this *Ruth* pleaded to *Boaz*, *Ruth* 3. 9. By which it appears, that ſhe verily believed that he was *legally* her Husband; and *Boaz* we ſee ſpeaks of her *as one that was a vertuous Woman, and known to be ſuch in the whole City*, v. 11. And he confeſſes *he was her near kinſman*, *only* he ſaith, *there was no nearer*, v. 12. By which it ſeems, if there had not, *Boaz* had made no Scruple of the matter: And the *Jews* ſay, in ſuch Marriages very little *Ceremony* was required, if the next of *Kin* did not renounce his right, becauſe the *Law* had determined the *Marriage* before hand. If you had but conſidered this one thing, you would have ſpared

the many *Observations* you make this Story.

3. You Object against 2 *Sam.* 12. 8. *as too much countenancing either Incest or Adultery, because it is said, That God gave to* David *his Masters Wives into his Bosom.* But 1. It is very strange to bring this place as a countenance to *Adultery*, which was purposely designed to upbraid *David* with the Sin of *Adultery*; and you will find it no easie matter, by the constitution of the *Mosaical Law*, to prove *Polygamy* to be *Adultery*. 2. The *Jews* give a fair Interpretation of this place, for they say, That the *Wife* of a *King* could could never *Marry* after her Husbands decease, as the *Gemara* on the Title *Sanhedrin* expresly saith, although some among them follow the Opinion of *R. Jehuda*, that she might Marry the succeeding *King*; but that is built chiefly on this place; of which the rest

reſt give a better account, *viz.* that נשים doth not imply *Saul*'s *Wives*, but the *Maids of Honour*, or *Attendants*, on the *Court* of *Saul*, which all fell into *David*'s power, and out of whom he might chooſe *Wives*, without danger of *Inceſt*; and even ſome of thoſe who aſſert it lawful for one *King* to Marry his Predeceſſors Wife, yet ſay in this caſe of *David*, that the Word only implies, that they were of *Saul*'s *Family*, as *Merab* and *Michal* were, but not *Saul*'s *Wives*. So that all the difficulty here ariſes only from the Interpretation of an *unuſual Word*, in which we have much more reaſon to truſt the *Jews* than other Writers.

Selden. uxor Ebra. l. 1. c. 10. Schick. De jure Reg. c. 16. Theor. 19.

4. You are much offended *at Hoſea*'s *Marrying an Adultereſs*: But all the formidable Difficulties of that place will preſently vaniſh, if you allow the *Prophetical Schemes*, wherein thoſe things are ſaid

ſaid to be done, which are intended only to repreſent in a more lively manner the things ſignified by them. And ſo you may ſee the *Chaldee Paraphraſe*, fully explains this place of *Hoſea*; and *Maimonides* purpoſely diſcourſeth on the *Prophetick Parables*, and brings this as one of the inſtances of them; and with him the reſt of the *Jewiſh Interpreters* agree. But you Object againſt ſuch a way of Teaching, *as tending to the encouragement of Vice*, which it is very far from, being deſigned to repreſent the odiouſneſs of it: For the whole Scope of the *Prophet* is to let the People underſtand, that their *Idolatry* was as hateful to *God* as the ſin of *Adultery*, and that the conſequence of it would be their Miſery and Ruin. And yet that *God* expreſſed as much tenderneſs to them, as a Man that was very fond of a Woman would do, in being unwilling

Maim. More Nevoch. l. 2. c. 46.

ling to put her away, although he knew ſhe were falſe to his Bed: the former is intended in the firſt *Chapter*, and the latter in the third. And what is there tending to Immorality in all this? May not *God* make uſe of one Vice, whoſe evil is more notorious to repreſent another by, whoſe evil they are more hardly convinced of? May not he ſet forth a *Degenerate People* by the *Sons* of an *Adultereſs?* And by the Names given to them expreſs his deteſtation of their Wickedneſs? Eſpecially when the *Parabolical* Terms are ſo clearly explained, as they are in the ſecond Chapter.

But you will ſay, *Theſe things are related as plain Matters of Fact; with the ſeveral Circumſtances belonging to them.* It is true, they are ſo, but ſo Parables uſe to be; ſo was *Nathan*'s to *David*; ſo is that of the Rich Man and *Lazarus*

rus in the *New Teſtament*; ſo is
Jer. 13. 4, 5. *Jeremies* going to *Euphrates to hide his Girdle*; (for it is not very likely the *Prophet* ſhould be ſent 18 or 20 Days Journey into an Enemies Country for no other end:) So
Ezek. 4. 5, 6. is *Ezekiels lying on one ſide for* 390 *Days, and having his Head and*
Ezek. 5. 1. *Beard* contrary to the Law, as *Maimonides* obſerves: And his
Ezek. 8. 8. *digging in the Walls of the Temple at* Hieruſalem, while he was in *Babylon*: And many other Things of a like nature, which are ſet forth with as punctual a Narration of Circumſtances as this of *Hoſea*, and yet they were only figurative Expreſſions. We that are accuſtomed to another way of Learning, think theſe Things ſtrange; but this was a very common way in the *elder* times, and it is to this Day much uſed in the *Eaſtern Countries*, to repreſent *Duties* to ſome, under the *Parables* of Things as really done by others:

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As may be ſeen in *Locman* and *Perzoes*, beſides what *Clemens Alexandrinus* and others have ſaid, concerning the *Antiquity* and common uſe of this *Paraborical* way of Teaching.

I now come to your Objections againſt the *New Teſtament*: But I find them ſo few, and thoſe ſo ſlight and inconſiderable, as to the end for which you produce them, that I may eaſily paſs them over. To that *aboat the continuance of Miracles*, I have already Anſwer'd: And I find not one Word in the Places mentioned by you, which implies the neceſſity of the continuance of them in all Ages of the *Chriſtian Church*. That place, *Mark* 10. 29, 30. ſpeaks of no more but ſuch a *recompence* in this life *as is conſiſtent with Perſecution*; and therefore muſt chiefly lie in inward contentment; which all wiſe Men have valued above external

ternal Accommodations; altho' withal, by the account St. *Paul* gives of himſelf, and his Brethren, God did abundantly provide for them one way or other.

2 Cor. 6. 10. *As having nothing, and yet enjoying all Things:* Which amounts to a Hundred-fold in this Life.

But certainly you are the firſt Man, Who have objected *the Obſcurity of the Book of Revelations, againſt the Authority of the Scriptures:* Which is juſt as if one ſhould Object the *Quadrature* of the *Circle* againſt *Mathematical Certainty.* If we grant that there are ſome Things in that *Myſtical Book*, we do not well underſtand; what then! Muſt neither that *Book*, nor any other of the *Bible*, be of *Divine Revelation?* I will not purſue the unreaſonableneſs of this way of arguing ſo far as I might; but I leave your ſelf to conſider of it; and of all that I have Written, in order to your

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Satisfaction. If you think fit to return an Anſwer, I pray do it clearly and ſhortly, and with that freedom from Paſſion, which becomes ſo weighty a Matter: And I beſeech *God* to give you a right Underſtanding in all Things. I am

June 11. 1675. *SIR,*

Your Faithful Servant.

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